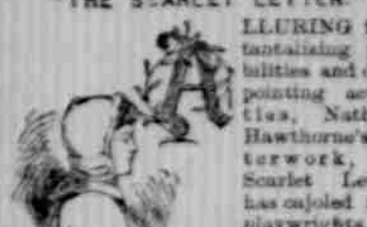
"THE SCARLET LETTER."



ALLURING in its tantalizing possibilities and disappointing actualities, Nathaniel Hawthorne's masterwork, "The Scarlet Letter," has cajoled many playwrights into attempting to make a drama out of what is essentially a story of thought and not of action. The reader who will shut himself out from the influences of the present and permit himself to be transported through the medium of "The Scarlet Letter" to that quaint old Puritan settlement where the master of romantic American fiction has laid the scene of his touching study of erring human nature as it existed 200 years ago, still exists today and always will exist, cannot fail to be impressed with the metaphysical strength of Hawthorne's work. He will perceive, if he be a student or close observer of the drama, its woeful lack of incident and its dependence for strength upon the artful, albeit masterful, manner in which the author compels the reader's imagination to aid him in supplying the pronounced colors in his pictures, most of which he has painted in neutral tints. In a book the mind of the person to be pleased must be catered to; in a play the eye and ear are practically the only agents for interpreting the writer's meaning.

For this reason, if for no other, "The Scarlet Letter" will never be satisfactorily dramatized. A play is not a literary condiment, as many seem to imagine. Neither is it a series of descriptive tableaux, strung together by jerky, analytical speeches, introduced for the purpose of leading up to the opportunity which the star must have to bring the curtain down upon a fine exhibition of his declamatory ability. The subject matter of the reflections of a man as he sits mute and motionless in a chair, might make very interesting reading, if well described, but it would scarcely be considered exciting and entertaining, or even instructive, if attempted on the stage. The character which thinks has no place in theatricals; it is the figure which acts that is necessary. The drama is essentially the realm of action, for living, moving figures are furnished as substitutes for the novelist's descriptions, and if these embodiments fail to sustain the lines marked out for them they fall short of their mission and belong not upon the stage.

Mr. Joseph Hatton is the last person to attempt a dramatization of "The Scarlet Letter," and it would be misleading to say that he had accomplished his task either well or ill, for he has simply reversed some incidents, much to their detriment, and clipped the author's dialogue almost verbatim. It is true that Mr. Hatton has also "written in" a mountebankish sort of fellow who is the master of the smuggling vessel on which Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale have planned to escape, but a boy might have done the same thing equally well. The elevation of Mary Willis into a robust, super-vivacious soubrette role also tends to mar the delicacy and refinement of treatment, which are conspicuous features of "The Scarlet Letter." Should this dramatization, as recently presented by Richard Mansfield at Daly's theatre, New York city, prove successful, it will not be on account of Mr. Hatton's work, but in spite of it.

Richard Mansfield is frequently spoken of by those critics who are never willing to admit that any one is wholly artistic, as "one of the best of the younger actors on the American stage." Mr. Mansfield is in my opinion the very best general perfor-

RICHARD MANSFIELD.

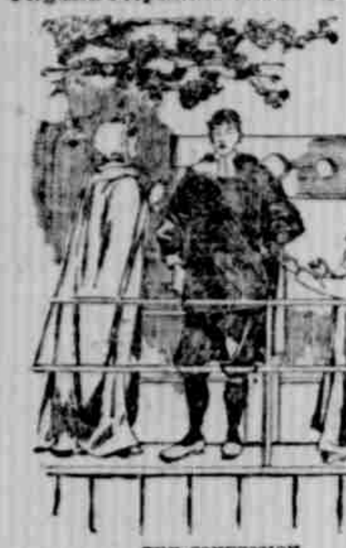
mer, old or young, in America. This statement may be disputed, but I believe that I shall be able to completely nonplus those who differ from me by asking them to name a man who is his superior in a majority of the lines of work which dramatic stars usually essay. It certainly cannot be said that any actor of the present day has done so much for the elevation of the stage in America. All of his plays, except "The Scarlet Letter," were written by Americans, and that is taken from an American source. In "Beau Brummell," "Baron Chevrial," "Prince Karl," "Nero," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," "Don Juan" and "The Scarlet Letter," Mr. Mansfield has depicted seven distinct character types, and it is no exaggeration to say that he has done them all particularly well. Some of them have responded more fully than others to his artistic touch, but in no case has his work sunk to the level of mediocrity.

Mansfield's conception of the character of Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale in "The Scarlet Letter" is remarkable, from the fact that it is, from sheer force of circumstances, necessarily a creation. He was something of a disappointment in the first act, and the words which bring down the curtain, "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone," were delivered in a rather hysterical manner that detracted greatly from the sublime strength of the situation. Mr. Mansfield requires a protracted, skillfully constructed, cumulative and sustained period of emotion, gathering force slowly as it goes along, to bring out to the full his phenomenal powers in denunciatory or self accusatory declamation. Two such opportunities are afforded him in "The Scarlet Letter," and that he took advantage of them is best evidenced by the statement that he received four curtain calls after each on the opening night.

Perhaps the greatest objection to Mr. Mansfield's work in the first act is to be found in the fact that he causes himself to look as abject as it is possible for mortal to appear. Therefore when he suffers additionally later on through the fiendish malignity of Chillingworth, the outraged husband who deliberately vivisects his soul, it is impossible for him to adequately portray the extra torture which his sensitive mentality is made to undergo. In other words, Mr. Mansfield sets too deep a type of anguish in the first act. He appears to be afflicted with introcession of the body; to be in fact on the extremest verge of total collapse. As a consequence his appearance of misery cannot be added to, as is manifestly intended and indeed required by the novel which is the ripest work of Hawthorne's genius.

Barring this defect, which may be easily corrected, and a disagreeable and newly acquired falsettoish tone of voice, Mr. Mansfield's enacting of the character of the soul racked and mind tortured minister is an artistic triumph of the first magnitude. His soliloquy on the scaffold and his lapse into unconsciousness is as fine a piece of acting as has ever been done by Mr. Mansfield, while his confession just before the final curtain is a marvel of intensely culminating dramatic effect.

Of Mr. Mansfield's company so much cannot be said. He will not have "sticks" about him in any circumstances, but the members of his support have very properly been selected with reference to their adaptability to Mr. Mansfield's repertory. It cannot be expected that a star will carry a company of creators, and therefore most of Mr. Mansfield's people, while excellent in their own lines of work, failed signally to grasp the full significance of Hawthorne's characters and words. For instance, Mr. W. J. Ferguson, an excellent comedian, was cast as Roger Chillingworth. He outrageously misdressed the part, making it a veritable Shylock, and while he was fairly good it is but natural to expect more than "fairly good" work from an actor of Mr. Ferguson's reputation and ability.



THE CONFESSION.

Miss Beatrice Cameron made a sweet, frail Hester Prynne, incapable of depicting emotion without exaggerating it into anguish. Thus, while her performance was conscientious, and even acceptable to those who have not read "The Scarlet Letter," she was in appearance and in every other important essential the very antithesis of the character which Hawthorne so graphically drew. Miss Cameron is an actress of undoubted ability, but limited powers.

Of the rest of the cast nothing need be said, for no one else had anything of importance to say or do, and the introduction of the minor characters by Mr. Hatton to enable him to supply "atmosphere" to the stage pictures was not attended with wholly successful results.

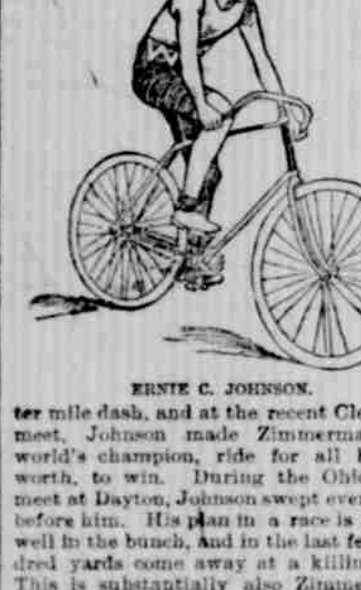
"The Scarlet Letter" stands as the protoplast of American fiction. The lesson it teaches is a grand one. Its introspection of the human heart—it may be almost said of the immortal soul—approaches the sublime. But there it stops. It thinks, teaches, dissects. It does not "move." Therefore it is unsuitable for dramatic purposes. The play, as presented by Richard Mansfield, suggests the story; it never puts the audience in thorough sympathy with it. As an exhibition of fine acting of a most difficult character, and the correct staging of a play which deals with the most picturesque period and people of American history, "The Scarlet Letter" is a success. As a dramatic production, from the critical and I believe also from the popular standpoint, it is a qualified failure. And yet so popular is Hawthorne's didactic story that mere curiosity is reasonably certain to make "The Scarlet Letter" a pecuniary success for Mr. Mansfield, at least during one season.

OCTAVUS COHEN.

A Fast Rider.

One of the most promising among the younger contingent of American bicyclists is Ernie C. Johnson, who might almost be called a lad, for he is not yet out of his teens. Johnson very sensibly inaugurated his career as a racer at his home city, Cleveland, two years ago. He was known to be very fast, but he completely surprised his friends on that occasion by corraling three first prizes and one second.

This was a pretty good beginning and a short time after Johnson went to Youngstown, O., and won every race in which he started, getting no less than five first prizes. Last May he defeated J. R. Hazleton, Philadelphia's crack rider, in a quar-



ERNIE C. JOHNSON.

ter mile dash, and at the recent Cleveland meet, Johnson made Zimmerman, the world's champion, ride for all he was worth, to win. During the Ohio state meet at Dayton, Johnson swept everything before him. His plan in a race is to keep well in the bunch, and in the last few hundred yards come away at a killing pace. This is substantially also Zimmerman's method.

A True Friend.

Van Winkle—Is the house you are building coming within the limit?

Von Blumer—Yes, indeed. I was peculiarly fortunate. The architect happened to be a friend of mine, and he is putting me up a $2,000 house for only $5,000.—Truth.

Brief Intervals.

"So you saw Charley Smithers yesterday?" said one girl.

"Yes," replied the other.

"Was he on horseback?"

"Y-yes. A second or so at a time."—Washington Star.

How He Worked It.

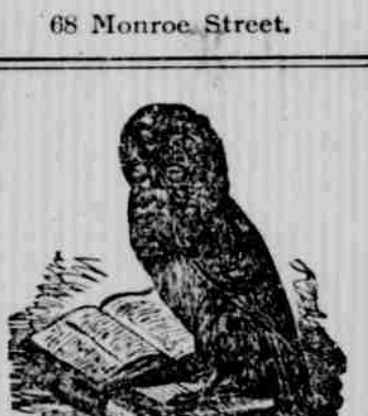
He—When a girl yawns I take it as a hint to go, no matter how early the hour.

She—I've wondered how you managed to make so many calls in an evening.—New York Herald.

Late and Early.

Father—No appetite this evening, eh? What is the matter? Late lunch?

Little Boy—No, sir. Early apples.—Good News.



Bulletin of New Books:

"The Danube," From the Black Forest to the Black Sea. By F. D. Millet, 419 illustrations by the author and Alfred Parsons. Harper & Bros	$ 2 50
"Principles of Ethics," by Borden P. Browne. Harper & Bros	1 75
"The Career of Columbus," Charles Elton, M. P., with map. Cloth	1 25
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"The Speech of Monkeys," by R. L. Garner. Portrait of the author. Cloth	1 00
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